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ABSTRACT

Sometimes good teachers may mistakenly assume that teaching strategies that worked with other children will work well with all students. This paper argues that educators must listen and communicate collaboratively with the student, the family, and other educators to discover the right combination of learning styles and instructional techniques that will work for each individual child. Teachers are encouraged to engage in collaborative planning, try innovative instructional techniques, and seek out advice. Failure to do this is to risk the loss of the student's self-esteem and motivation to learn. (LMI)

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Communication Skills:

Success is All a Matter of How You Say Things

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Communication Skills:

Success is All a Matter of How You Say Things

Working with students is not an easy job. Sometimes working with their families can be even harder. Sometimes though it is not what we say to them, but how we say it. And sometimes a great deal depends on who and how anyone is really listening.

Have you heard the story about the old preacher who moonlighted as a house painter? He had the best horse and buggy in town. Everyone liked and admired them. The only thing was, since the preacher was very religious he had taught his horse to go to the command of, "Praise the Lord!" He had taught him to halt to the command of, "Amen!" This worked fine for them. Besides, the preacher was the only one who drove the rig anyway.

One day as the preacher was out painting a house, a new fellow stopped by. "Hey, Man!" he called. "That's a mighty fine horse and buggy you have there. Mind if I drive it?"

The old preacher thought about it for a minute and could not think of any reason why not. "Sure," he said, "But there are a few things I need to tell you about my horse."

"No, that's all right," the new fellow replied cockily. "I know all about horses."

"Well, you don't know about *my* horse," returned the preacher. "He's really rather unique."

"I've never seen a horse and buggy I could not drive," the fellow responded as he climbed up into the buggy.

"OK," said the preacher, thinking he'd just see about that...

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The new fellow clicked the reigns on the horse and told him to, "Giddy-up!"

The horse did nothing.

The new fellow tried again. Still nothing from the horse. The new fellow tried every trick he could think of to get the horse to go. Still nothing. Finally, in desperation he rolled his eyes at the old preacher who said, "Praise the Lord!"

The horse promptly took off. Vastly relieved that the horse was finally in motion, the new fellow relaxed to enjoy his ride. Soon the fellow needed to slow the horse down because he could see that they were coming to a big curve in the road. He tired to get the horse to slow down, but nothing worked.

"Whoa..." he cried. The horse continued to gallop. If anything he ran a little faster!

Starting to panic the fellow tried everything again. Still nothing worked. As he saw a huge cliff right around the curve, he started to panic! If he could not get the horse to stop they were going to go right over the edge of the cliff and face certain death!! Finally, in desperation, he began to pray out loud, "Oh, Lord, I have tried everything I can think of to stop this horse and nothing works! If he doesn't stop immediately we are going to fall over this cliff and face certain death! Please help me, Lord! AMEN!!!"

At the exact moment that he cried, "AMEN!" the horse abruptly stopped just inches from the edge of the cliff! Greatly relieved, the fellow fell back into his seat and while wiping his bough,

cried out, "Praise the Lord!"

You can guess what happened next...

It is all a matter of communication.

The horse knew his commands and responded to them well. It is just that the other guy did not know them. He would not listen when someone was trying to help him. He thought he knew it all. But, he did not know the right things to say or do to get this horse to respond. The old preacher had tried to warn him, but he was so sure that he knew it all that he did not want to take the time to listen.

In the story it cost him his life.

It is a funny, but sad story of poor communication. The old preacher did not communicate the horse's learning style well. The new fellow really did not want to listen. The result was a common disaster. The fellow lost his life. The preacher lost his horse and buggy. Everyone lost. It was a lose/lose situation.

Working with students is often this way. Very good teachers who think they have taught all kinds of learners, assume that what worked for other children will work with a particular student. Sometimes they are successful. Sometimes they are not. What works for one learner may or may not work for another.

But each of these students do have ways that will help them learn. It is up to us to *listen as well as communicate* collaboratively with the student, the family, and with other educators to find the right combination of learning styles and instructional techniques that will work for each individual child.

For every student there is a winning combination. It is just a matter of finding it.

To often one segment of this triad will be absolutely certain that they know what works. Then they do not really *want* to listen to what others have to say. Too often new ideas, such as brain dominance, inclusion, or authentic assessment are not really listened to. Sometimes it is because the new ideas are not communicated well. Sometimes, unfortunately, it is because not everyone really wants to listen. They are too certain that their preconceived ideas are right. Therefore, new ideas must be wrong.

It is difficult when everyone is not really communicating and truly willing to work together. Worse yet, there are those who have a mind-set that some things will not work anyway. Why waste time listening to more propaganda? Their minds are all ready made up.

Like the fellow with the horse, sometimes not having open communication can have disastrous results. The loser here is more than a horse and a buggy. It is a student. If the student loses his drive, his motivation, his "want to," and his self-esteem is ruined when he is so young, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to get it back in his later years.

The solution? Simple.

Always listen with your heart and mind as well as your ears. Give each student the care and attention you would want given to your own child if the situations were reversed. Seek out advise. Plan collaboratively. Be willing to try new methods. Do not be

set in your ways. What worked for all other horses did not work for this horse. What works for most students will not work for all students.

Each student should be an individual triumph, a chance for a true, "Praise the Lord!" as well as an "Amen!" Always keep the channels of communication open. Communicate with every family like you would want to be communicated with. When parents know you care, they will give you their trust and their hearts as well as their child. Then, together, we can find the keys to success for every child.

It is all a matter of communication.